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SUGGESTED CHANGE OF LINES FOR MISSION FURNITURE

BY CHARLES EDWARD HOOPER

ONCE upon a time our forebears lived literally upon the flat,—whether above or below ground does not matter. Life was then most brutally simple and the needs for such contrivances as furniture were still of the far away future. When the early craftsman evolved the idea of the table, he followed the simple structural conditions suggested in the raised platforms of the Swiss Lake-dwellers. A further advancement suggested the bench, or form, built on similar lines. The forerunner of the chair, the stool, was still a great way off and a luxury in many houses, long after the Middle Ages. None of these early contrivances were handsome and their forming and perfecting into lines of decorative grace was analogous with the evolutionary making of man himself.

Later, as the requirements of living demanded, the artistic embellishment of these structural forms began to take shape and distinction, arriving at last at a stage that has never since been equalled. But in all this the structural element was not for a moment lost sight of and as the basic anatomy of all art is structural, it but follows the natural artistic bent.

'Tis a long way from the first table to the early church, yet the latter, ever mindful of the life of the Saviour, lost no chance to impress its hardships and sacrifices upon her teachers. Consequently her furniture was of a style and character which denied not its ancestry and was warranted to fulfil its mission.

Several centuries have elapsed and we are living in the present, very far removed from the first table and the early church. Yet in our midst there came to life a rebirth, a throwback, which some person or persons unknown have dubbed "Mission," which inflicts upon our ease-loving public a sense of the unbeautiful, nor is it fitted for perfect comfort and relaxation. Despite its homely stability it can make no claim to art or grace, nor is its masculine stiffness relieved by the uncertain touch of the craftsman's tool.

While some examples of this style (if style we may call it) may be admirably suited to the rusticity of the log cabin or the informality of the bungalow, they surely do not fit into any surroundings that may lay claim to architectural excellence, hence their use, at least wisely, is very limited. But being a thing of structure only, it still offers us a "blank" for simple embellishment. The fact that most of it is heavy and ungainly in form makes it the better for our purpose, as in the reduction of its necessary bulk we are arriving at two good ends: that of effecting a pleasing transformation and a corresponding

reduction of weight. And this last is an item not to be lightly ignored.

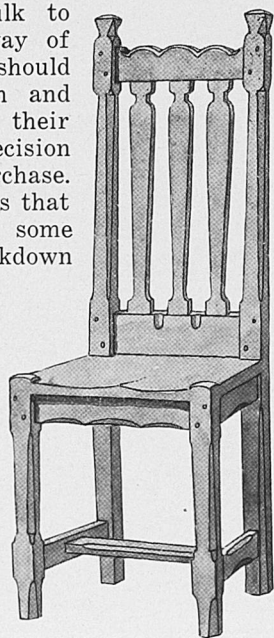
We are not in this writing, attempting to influence the manufacturers of the so-called mission furniture, but rather to point out to the consumer, who may be open to the suggestion, that there is a chance here to soften the lines of brutality and produce on a foundation, having good structural qualities, a thing which may approach near to a commendable standard of design. Naturally opinions differ as to a standard of artistic excellence, but one would hardly question that the lines of the mission style may be improved with considerate treatment. To what extent this treatment may be applied, depends largely on the surroundings and use to which the article may be put. There is one thing evident however, and this is that a mission hall-chair, for instance, that would be utterly out of place in a period hall, might easily, with proper handling, fill the office with reasonable success.

The reader may very naturally ask, and with good reason: "Why go to all this bother to alter a thing of this sort? If it be not satisfactory, why not buy something that is?" We will have to own such a solution to be *one* way out of the difficulty, but the *other* way offers an escape from everlasting sameness and a chance to get something that is a bit different and often there is a deal of satisfaction even in this. Then too, one may already have examples which could be benefited in this way.

In the selection of types, one must needs bear in mind that each piece should always have a certain amount of bulk to allow for the cutting away of wood. And these types should be studied in the rough and some idea formed as to their possibilities, before a decision is reached regarding purchase. There are numerous houses that make mission forms and some furnish the goods in knockdown



STOCK TABLE WITH TAPERING LEGS—AFTER EMBELLISHMENT. BOTH THIS AND THE TWO ISOLATED CHAIRS HAVE PLAIN, SQUARE EDGED MEMBERS IN THE ORIGINAL FORMS.

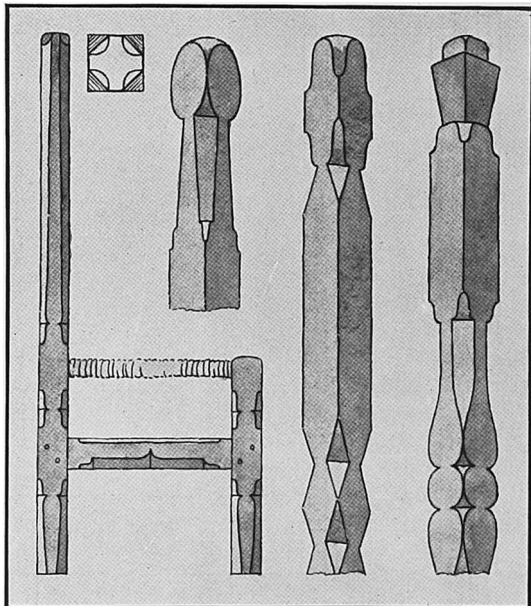


MEDIUM WEIGHT CHAIR—VERTICAL EFFECT. AFTER ADAPTATION.

form. Even those who do not make a specialty of this last, would probably furnish what is desired upon request. We mention this, as the knockdown article, being unassembled, is easier to handle than the completely assembled thing. This applies more particularly to such articles as have cross members likely to interfere with the working; chairs in general, and tables with cross-rails. A table of the type shown in our illustration might be done as the thing stands, but easier by far if the members can be handled separately, while a bureau, with external cuts only, could probably be operated upon with fair ease in its regular commercial form.

As to the execution of this work: it often happens that one is more or less of a tinker and as the cuts adhered to, in the pictorial suggestions, (outside the changes in profile of splats and rails) are almost all chamfer cuts with occasional gouge work, the actual working out is more a question of time than of difficulty in execution. Naturally, if one can get his work into a vise, it is steadier and hence easier to handle and for this reason the unassembled piece of furniture is preferable, as has already been stated.

In the laying out of the work, it is simply necessary to define the patterned limits of the cut in

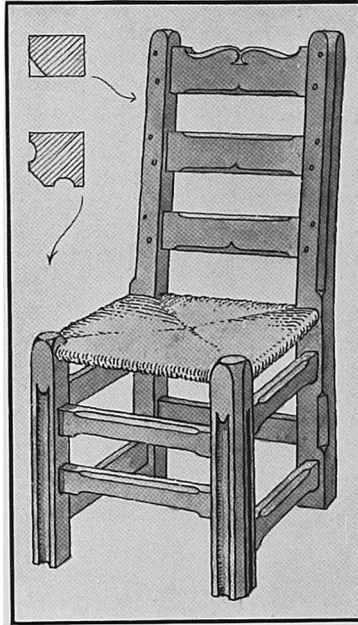


THESE CUTTINGS ARE ALL CHAMFER PATTERNS. A DRAW SHAVE, A SPOKE SHAVE, A JACK-KNIFE AND A GOUGE ARE ALL THE TOOLS NECESSARY FOR DESIGNS SUGGESTED.

pencil on the adjacent faces of the angle to be cut away and work to these. As to the methods and tricks of tool handling, such is outside the scope of this article.

Of tools: the draw-shave and chisel are the most important while the jack-knife and gouge may be used in supplementary way. The spoke-shave is more of a smoothing tool and would be required but little, as the draw-shave leaves a sharper, cleaner edge and can be reversed to work with both edges as occasion requires. Reasonably straight-grained wood is essential.

In the laying out of the design, the various members should be loosely assembled so that the collected individual cuts may have their proper relation to one another in the completed piece. Often, too,



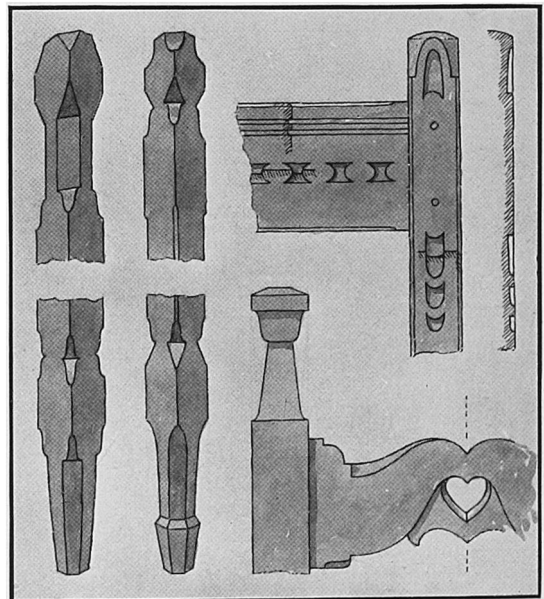
A HEAVY STOCK CHAIR WITH NUMEROUS MEMBERS. AFTER ADAPTATION.

it will be found to advantage that a slight outward curve be given to the long cut, whose intention is practically that of a straight one, and on the same principle as the entasis to a column. Then, too, a series of related short, straight cuts may often be made to suggest the effect of a curve and may imply strength where such be desirable. Or again, the curve and the straight cut connecting, from the very fact of their opposition, would produce results not obtainable in any

other way. The design should be well studied.

It will be observed of the heavy chair here pictured, that owing to the continued interference of the rails with the uprights, these latter members are not so easily adapted to the chamfer cut as the corresponding members in the other pictorial example. To attempt such with the short intervals between rails would be apt to result in a "nubby" effect, anything but pleasing to the eye. Yet the actual problem might on the other hand offer a chance for novelty which our limited knowledge of actual measurements and proportions make it wiser not to suggest here.

We have not of course, shown examples of the entire range of furniture; this would simply be repetition and would be hardly necessary. It is after all a question of simple suggestions which we leave to the individual taste of the reader.



SHOWING POSSIBILITIES IN CUTTING. THESE SUGGESTIONS CAN READILY BE ADAPTED.